

Our Daily Bread





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by

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Introduction

The greatest gift that a loving and merciful God has ever bestowed upon mankind is Jesus Christ—for Christ is God incarnate. His delight was to be with the children of men. He instituted the sacrament of the Real Presence so He might be with them always as their changeless Friend, their inspiring Counselor, and their great High Priest.

In myriad tabernacles scattered among all the countries of the world, the Eucharistic Christ is dwelling among His people. Not only does He dwell among them, but He also gives Himself to them for the nourishment of their souls. Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, consubstantial with the Father, gives Himself, body and blood, soul and divinity to mortal man in Holy Communion. Through a miracle of divine power, Jesus Christ gives Himself to us for Our Daily Bread.

Here is divine omnipotence emptying itself in the frail bosom of humanity. Here is divine love exhausting itself in the heart of man. Stripping Himself of the outward effulgence of the Godhead that He might not overawe man with His dazzling splendor, Jesus Christ comes under the lowly appearance of the Eucharistic Host to weak and mortal man.

He is our daily bread. Truly, this is God's supreme gift to man. The mind reels and staggers in trying to conceive how even an infinite God could bestow upon mankind a greater gift.

The tremendous implications of this mighty truth are thus pointed out by Robert Browning when he said, "I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ, Accepted by thy reason, solves for Thee, All questions in the world and out of it."

Christ, who cleansed the lepers, restored sight to the blind, healed the sick, pardoned sinners, and died on Calvary's Cross for the redemption of mankind, is present in the Eucharist. When Christ appeared to His Apostles in the upper chamber after His resurrection, the doors and windows were closed. Yet Christ stood suddenly in their midst and spoke to them. In that same glorified body which transcends the properties of matter, Christ is present in the sacrament of His love. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist stands, therefore, as an antidote for the vagueness of contemporary thought and as an anchor against the shifting currents of modern uncertainty and doubt. It takes God out of the mists of speculation and brings Him into our very midst to be our Counselor, our Inspirer, and our changeless Friend. In Holy Communion He comes to us as our heavenly manna, the bread of angels, and the nutriment for our souls. All who hold steadfast to this central doctrine of historical Christianity will find in it an invincible armor against the assaults of modern unbelief. It is the soldier's shield against danger and temptation.

The Teaching of Christ

Let us glance briefly at the teaching of Christ on this subject. It is stated with great clarity in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John in the following verses:

“Amen, amen I say unto you: He that believeth in me hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven; that, if any man eat of it, he may not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life and I will raise him up in the last day.”

“For my flesh is meat indeed; and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead. He that eateth this bread shall live forever.”

These things he said, teaching in the synagogue, in Capharnaum. Many therefore of his disciples, hearing it, said, “This saying is hard, and who can hear it?”

“After this many of his disciples went back; and walked no more with him. Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that thou art the Christ, the Son of God.”

Christ fulfilled the promise to give them His flesh to eat and His blood to drink at the Last Supper, the night before He died. Saint Matthew thus records the fulfillment. “And while they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke and gave to His disciples and said, “Take ye and eat. This is my body.” And taking the chalice, He gave thanks and gave to them, saying, “Drink ye all of this; for this is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins.”

With the words, “Do ye this in commemoration of me,” Christ authorized and commanded the Apostles and their successors to do the same as He had just done. Saint Paul reflects this belief and practice of the Church in the first century, which is the same as that of the Church in the twentieth century, when he writes to the Corinthians, “The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread

which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?" Such then is the clear teaching of Christ concerning the Holy Eucharist—the Sacrament bringing to us His body and blood as our food and nourishment. Such is the belief of the Apostles and of all the members of the Church founded by Christ for more than nineteen hundred years.

“The Word of Christ is Sufficient. . .”

One day a messenger, breathless with haste, burst in upon King Louis IX of France with surprising news. “Your Majesty,” he cried, “hasten to the Church! A great miracle is occurring there. A priest is saying Holy Mass and, after the consecration, instead of the host there is visible on the altar Jesus Himself in His human figure. Everybody is marveling at it. Hurry before It disappears.”

To the astonishment of the messenger, the saintly monarch calmly replied, “Let them go see that miracle who have any doubt regarding the real presence of our Lord in the Holy Sacrament. As for me, even if I saw Jesus on the altar in His visible form, touched Him with my hand, and heard His voice, I should not be more convinced than I now am that He is present in the consecrated Host. The word of Christ is sufficient for me. I need no miracle.” Such too should be the faith of every believer in Christ. For what greater credential can there be for any Christian than the word of Christ Himself?

We come now to this question. What use are we making of the greatest gift within the power of an Omnipotent God to bestow upon mankind—the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist? We can avail ourselves of this divine benefaction by attending holy Mass and offering in union with the priest the Eucharistic Victim in atonement for our sins, by visiting our Eucharistic King in the tabernacles on our altars, and particularly by receiving our divine Lord in Holy Communion. No devotion is dearer to the Church than that of frequent, even daily Holy Communion. Pius XI encouraged all the faithful to receive frequently this heavenly food. It offers the greatest assistance in living an upright and holy life, and constitutes our sure defense against all the temptations that assail us.

Fruits of Sacrament

The fruits of this sacrament are manifold. It deepens our sense of the reality of God, makes us conscious of His comradeship, and enables us to perceive Him as the witness of our every deed, the auditor of our every word, the spectator of the thoughts and aspirations that stir inarticulately in the silent kingdom of the soul.

Closer is He than Breathing, Nearer than Hands or Feet

It frees us from the tyranny of the senses, which are dependent upon the visible, the tangible, and the palpable. It helps us to realize the most profound realities of life are those that are spiritual and lie beyond the reach of the senses. It enables us to understand what Saint Paul meant when he said, "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal." It prompts us to exclaim with the holy souls of every age, "Ah! Christ, impalpable, I grasp Thee; inapprehensible, I clutch Thee."

It delivers us from the narrow prison cell of time and place by making us one in spirit with the choice souls of every generation to whom the presence of God is the most abiding reality in life. It enables us to break through the shell of external circumstance and grasp the kernel of spiritual reality that alone gives meaning and significance to human life. Our sharpened perception of spiritual reality and heightened sense of the presence of God constitute the essential difference between the religious-minded person and the worldling.

While making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1925, I chanced to pass through Smyrna in Asia Minor. It was shortly after the Turks had pillaged and burned the city, and put hundreds to the sword. Still standing among the ruins was a convent. Among the nuns was one from Ireland. "Do you not feel lost," I asked, "in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, so far from your home in Ireland?" Pointing to the tabernacle she replied, "Father, wherever the Blessed Sacrament is, there I am at home, for there is my Lord and my God."

How true that is! They are the words every religious, priest, nun, or lay person can utter. How effectively does the Eucharistic Lord dispel the touch of nostalgia from the heart of the missionary arriving in a foreign land. For where our Lord and our God is, there can be no homesickness, for He is the essential element in every home.

Hidden Source of Strength

I have visited homes in Mexico where sisters, wearing the dress of laywomen, were carrying on the work of Christian education in spite of the government's prohibition. No religious picture, image, or symbol could be displayed. No tabernacle, no altar, no chapel was permitted. Yet, in every such home, I would be led into a room where hidden away in a bureau, bookcase or other furniture was the Blessed Sacrament. There the sisters repaired to draw strength and courage to continue their uphill fight against the systematic efforts of the revolutionary government to stamp out religion from the land. Take away their garb, their altar, their chapel, their crucifixes and all the external symbols of their faith, but leave them their Eucharistic Lord and King, and you will have left them all that matters.

To that hidden place they go to give themselves Holy Communion, and thus to keep alive in the twentieth century the glorious traditions of the Church of the Catacombs. That which has kept the faith alive in Mexico, in spite of the savage persecution it has suffered is the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist has been kept in thousands of homes, barns, and caves beyond the spying eyes of the minions of the government. The gentle Christ who said, "My delight is to be with the children of men," is fulfilling His promise and is providing the Catholics of Mexico in the hour of trial, with their hidden source of strength and courage. With their backs to the wall and their faces to the stars, the Eucharistic Christ will hearten them for the combat until they have shown once again to the world the futility of machine guns and firing squads to crush the naked human soul when steeled with a deathless faith.

It is not only to missionaries in distant lands, and to Christians under the fire of persecution, however, that the Holy Eucharist brings strength and intrepidity, but to all lonely and homesick souls. On the day I write these lines, a student said to me, "Father, when I came to the University a few weeks ago, I was homesick and lonely. It is so large an institution and this is my first time away from home for any length of time. However, after receiving Holy Communion all feelings of loneliness and homesickness vanished." He little knew that he was but voicing the experience of every student and of every person away from the warmth of the family fireside and the loving atmosphere of home. It is the experience of every soldier and sailor as well. When Christ comes into our heart, there we are at home—in any city or in any land.

Everyone who has felt the warm intimacy of the love of Christ in frequent Holy Communion is able to make his own the words of a contemporary poet.

*Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny:
Yea with one voice, o world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.*

Another fruit of Holy Communion is the strength that it gives to resist temptation and to break any habit of sin previously acquired. Some think frequent Holy Communion should be the exclusive privilege of holy souls far removed from the dangers of sin. Yet the Sacred Congregation of the Council thought otherwise. For in its Decree on Daily Holy Communion the Council expressly declares:

"The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet is directed chiefly to this end, that the faithful, being united to God by means of the Sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults, and to avoid those graver sins to which human

frailty is liable; so that its primary purpose is not that the honor and reverence due to our Lord may be safeguarded, or that the Sacrament may serve as a reward of virtue bestowed on the recipients. Hence, the holy Council of Trent calls the Eucharist 'the antidote whereby we are delivered from daily faults and preserved from deadly sin.' "

It is therefore needed most of all by those who are weak and are struggling to break the manacles of a sinful habit. It is the supreme remedy against temptation and the most powerful influence in freeing one from a vicious practice. There is no habit, no matter how strong the links in the chain of its practice, that can long resist the sledgehammer blows of this sacrament. The manacles of sensuality, intoxication, anger, jealousy, greed, all fall into smithereens before the devastating blows of this divine power.

This truth is illustrated by an incident related by Saint Philip Neri. As a result of a long life spent in ministering to the youth of Rome, this holy priest was wont to declare that frequent Holy Communion was not only the most efficacious means of safeguarding virtue, but was also the only effective means of breaking the chains of certain habits of sensuality. One day a youth came to his confessional and said, "Father, I am bound hand and foot by the chain of a sensual habit which I have tried in vain to break. In spite of all my efforts to reform, I find myself falling again and again. I would do anything if I could but free myself from its galling tyranny which is making my life a living hell."

"Do you really wish to break yourself of this habit?" asked Saint Philip.

"Father," replied the youth, "give me any penance and see if I will not gladly do it."

"All right, then," said the priest, "I will give you an infallible remedy. You go to daily Holy Communion for a month. If you should be so unfortunate as to experience a single relapse, which may God avert, I ask you to rush immediately to confession, and then to Holy Communion."

This the youth did. At the end of the month, he was able to say, "Father, for the first time in years I am able to draw the breath of a free man. Not only has daily Holy Communion freed me from this practice, but it has filled me with such revulsion for that vice that I feel confident I will never again stoop to that degradation."

In the experience of that young man, there is mirrored the experience of all mankind— young and old. So true is this that every confessor can say to any penitent groveling in the mire of sensuality or manacled by the chains of an oft-repeated act, "My friend, do you really wish to break this habit? If you do, you will go to daily Holy Communion until you have broken this habit. If you are not willing to do this, you are making a mockery of the purpose of amendment. You are lacking in determination and in sincerity."

It is high time penitents realize that purpose of amendment means more than a mere moving of the lips. It means the whole-hearted utilization of a remedy of demonstrated effectiveness. In short, it means having recourse to daily Holy Communion.

“But Now I am Strong . . .”

During the persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, many Christians paid with their life for their faith in Christ. Among the number seized on one occasion were a father and his young son. Brought before the pagan tribunal, the Emperor commanded the father to offer incense to the gods of imperial Rome or pay the penalty with his life.

“Rather than betray the Faith,” replied the father, “which has been purchased for me at the cost of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, I will die.”

Whereupon he was cast into the arena and there, before the howling savage mob, he suffered the gladiator’s sword to sever his head from his body, thus sealing with his life’s blood his faith in the crucified Christ.

As the son, a little boy of twelve, witnessed the cruel death inflicted upon his father, he was overcome with horror. His face grew pale with fear. Tears filled his eyes. The Emperor, seeing the terror-stricken condition of the boy, said, . . . “You surely will not do such a foolish thing as your father. Come, offer incense to the gods of Rome and I will not only spare thy life but will give thee anything thy youthful heart will ask.”

The boy had taken a few steps toward the incense pyre when suddenly he stopped spellbound in his tracks. What was that voice he heard echoing in his inner ear? It was the voice of his martyred sire uttering his dying words.

Turning about, he walked quickly over to the spot in the arena where the sand was still crimsoned with the warm life-blood of his father. He stooped and, clenching it in his hand, said, “But a few moments ago I was weak and about to yield, but now I am strong with the blood of my father. Rather than deny the faith purchased for me by the blood of Jesus Christ and of my own martyred father, I too will die.”

With a smile lighting up his youthful countenance and a prayer on his lips, he placed his head upon the swordsman’s block. As the head fell, severed from the body, the blood trickling down in the sand mingled with the warm life-blood of his father. Devout Christians who stood nearby saw in that union a reflection of that other union that took place beyond the skies, where father and son were clasped in the arms of the Master to receive from His hand the glorious crown of martyrdom.

Every communicant can truthfully utter the words of the martyred youth. "A little while ago," he could say, "I was weak and about to yield, but now I am strong with the blood of my Father and my God. Rather than betray Him by the commission of a deliberate mortal sin, I too would be willing to die."

In Holy Communion, we do not merely clench blood-crimsoned sand in our hands; we receive into our very hearts the body and blood, and the soul and divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We become partakers of a divine life and secure a foretaste of that union with Christ in the beatific vision that constitutes the essential happiness of heaven.

Notre Dame Men Testify

Notre Dame is famous throughout the land for her prowess on the gridiron, where her stalwart sons are adding year after year new luster to the glorious traditions of Rockne, Gipp, Pilney, and the other immortals. Yet, in the eyes of Catholics, Notre Dame has won greater laurels for her marvelous success in drawing a vast army of her students to the daily Banquet Table. Every day, more than 1,600 people crowd the altar railings in the chapels of every hall on the campus. It is the most inspiring sight at Notre Dame.

During the past fall, this writer noticed, among the hundreds of others, a husky young student hobbling to the altar rail, despite bruises and injuries that made the "going tough." After football practice and scrimmaging, and injuries to boot, it would have been so easy to sleep through until his eight o'clock class. Yet, every morning he was found at the rail. When the curtain fell upon another unbeaten team at Notre Dame, the name of this young gladiator was upon the rosters of All-Americans picked by the experts of the land. Who but God will ever know how much of that courage and strength he found at the Banquet Table of the Lord?

In their own words, the students respond to the question, "What does frequent Holy Communion mean to you?"

"I go to Holy Communion every day because I need God's help in temptations and because I can do so much good for the Poor Souls. My communions make me feel much nearer to God and I cannot describe the wonderful feeling that comes over me."

"Frequent communion gives, first, a peaceful conscience; second, strength against temptation; and third, greater power of concentration in studies and in religion."

"If one starts frequent communion, it seems to me that he acquires a grace whereby he wishes to continue. If you miss, it seems one less chance to gain grace and do right."

“Since I have begun the practice of daily communion, I find myself more careful in my speech. It makes me try to keep from mortal sin; it makes me receive the Holy Eucharist with more fervor; it makes it easier to approach the confessional.”

Still More Fruits

Among the other fruits of Holy Communion are increase of sanctifying grace, remission of venial sins, strengthening of the will, increased horror of sin, and remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. Even mortal sin is washed from the soul of the person who, unmindful of such an offense, receives Holy Communion in good faith. This implies that the communicant has sorrow for all his sins and, if the mortal sin should later come to his mind, he will mention it in his next confession. The reason for this indirect remission of mortal sin through Holy Communion is to be found in the fact that it infuses sanctifying grace into the soul of the person who does not knowingly place an obstacle in the way. Sanctifying grace not only beautifies the soul, it also removes any mortal or venial sin that may be there. Hence, Holy Communion indirectly remits even mortal sin.

In discussing the effectiveness of Holy Communion in strengthening the will to resist temptation, the Catechism of the Council of Trent says, “In the holy mysteries is, moreover, such efficacy as to preserve us pure and unhurt from sin and from the assault of temptations, and to prepare the soul, as it were, by a heavenly medicine, against the easy approach and infection of virulent and deadly disease. It also restrains and represses the lust of the flesh; for whilst it inflames souls more with the fire of charity, it, of necessity, extinguishes the ardor of concupiscence.” (Part ii, chapter 4, question 51.)

Saint Thomas Aquinas, Prince of Church Theologians, sums up the far-reaching effects of Holy Communion by saying, “The Sacrament of the Body of the Lord puts the demons to flight, defends us against the incentives to vice and to concupiscence, cleanses the soul from sin, assuages the anger of God, enlightens the understanding to know God, inflames the will and affections with the love of God, fills the memory with spiritual sweetness, confirms the entire man in good, frees us from eternal death, multiplies the merits of a good life, leads us to our everlasting home, and reanimates the body to eternal life.”

The person who is strengthened to resist temptation is, by that very fact, heartened to fight more courageously for virtue, honor, right, and manliness. One who knows he is free from sin and whose friendship with his Lord and Maker has been deepened and made more intimate through Holy Communion throws himself into his undertakings with greater courage and abandon.

Knute Rockne's Story

Knute Rockne, the famed coach at Notre Dame, tells of the deep impression made upon him by witnessing his players arise on the morning of a game and go off to receive Holy Communion. His observant eye could not fail to notice the abandon with which such players threw themselves into the game and fought with the courage of untamed tigers.

Here, in brief, is the way Rockne tells the story. "I used to be deeply impressed at the sight of my players receiving Communion every morning, and finally I made it a point of going to Mass with them on the morning of a game. I realized that it appeared more or less incongruous, when we arrived in town for a game, for the general public to see my boys rushing off to church as soon as they got off the train, while their coach rode to the hotel and took his ease. So, for the sake of appearances, if nothing else, I made it a point to go to church with the boys on the morning of a game.

"One night before a big game in the East, I was nervous and worried about the outcome of the game the next day and was unable to sleep. I tossed and rolled about the bed, and finally decided to get up and dress, then go down to the lobby and sit in a chair alone with my thoughts. It must have been two or three o'clock in the morning when I arrived in the deserted lobby, so I took a chair and tried to get that football game off my mind by engaging some bellboys in conversation.

"Along about five or six o'clock in the morning I started pacing the lobby of the hotel when suddenly I ran into two of my players hurrying out. I asked them where they were going at such an hour, although I had a good idea.

"Then I retired to a chair in the corner of the lobby where I couldn't be seen, but where I could see everyone who went in or out of the door. Within the next few minutes, my players kept hurrying out of the door in pairs and groups, and finally when they were about all gone, I got over near the door so I could question the next player who came along. In a minute or two, the last members of the squad hurried out of an elevator and made for the door. I stopped them and asked them if they, too, were going to Mass, and they replied that they were. I decided to go along with them.

"Although they probably didn't realize it, these youngsters were making a powerful impression on me with their piety and devotion. When I saw all of them walking up to the Communion rail to receive, and realized the several hours' sleep they had sacrificed to do this, I understood for the first time what a powerful ally their religion was to those boys in their work on the football field. This was when I really began to see the light; to know what was missing in my life, and, later on, I had the great pleasure of being able to join my boys at the Communion rail."

Requirements for Daily Communion

What are the requirements for daily Communion? In answer to this question, the Sacred Congregation of the Council decreed on December 16, 1905 as follows:

1. “Frequent and daily Communion, as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life. Thus, no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the holy table with a right and devout disposition, can lawfully be hindered therefrom.”
2. “A right disposition consists in this: that he who approaches the holy table should do so, not out of routine, or vain-glory, or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, of being more closely united with Him by charity, and of seeking this Divine remedy for his weaknesses and defects.”

From this, it is evident that any person who is not certain that he is in the state of mortal sin, and who approaches the holy table for the purpose of nourishing his soul with this heavenly bread, is to be admitted to the sacrament. Mere scruples or doubts are not sufficient to prohibit him. Nothing would be sufficient but the absolute certainty of mortal sin.

Furthermore, it is not necessary for one to go to confession every time one wishes to receive. This would impose some inconvenience on a person and would doubtless deter many. The Council is explicit in declaring that nothing need keep a person from approaching as often as he wishes, provided only that he is in the state of grace and has the proper disposition. By making daily Holy Communion so easily available, the Church shows her profound solicitude in having the faithful approach with the greatest frequency.

“The Food of Life”

Speaking at the National Eucharistic Congress at New Orleans, Archbishop Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, declared, “We call ours a Christian civilization. Now Christian means followers of Christ, and the substance of Christianity is the life of Christ within us, in our thoughts and in our private and public actions. If such a life is lacking, there remains nothing of Christianity but the name; and this is left to us not as a glory but as a reproach.”

“Our altars are the center of this life—the center for the priests who offer the Eucharistic sacrifice there, and make known the word of God there; the centre for the faithful who, gathering in the churches before the altar, strengthen their souls at the tabernacle. We must not think of the tabernacle simply as a shrine to be visited, nor must we regard the

Eucharist merely as a sacred symbol to be honored. It is a food to be received, it is the food of life, of the Christian life—which therefore ought to be a Eucharistic life, and a Eucharistic life cannot but be an apostolate.”

After pointing out evils that distress him, the Holy Father in his radio address to the Congress said, “May we not discern, however, a promise of better things for the Universal Church in the reflowering among you and among all peoples of Eucharistic love and the daily increase of ardent devotion for the august Sacrament? While we exhort you from our paternal heart to most holy zeal towards the Blessed Sacrament, we fervently pray with you that, strong in youth, your people, who stand forth in wealth and power, may also be a shining example of Catholic faith and Christian virtue.”

Objections

Let us now consider some of the objections to frequent and daily Communion.

I do not consider myself worthy to receive Holy Communion often.

This objection is based upon a misconception of the primary purpose of Holy Communion. It is not so much a reward for virtue as it is an antidote for sin. “If you are not worthy to communicate every day,” asks Saint Ambrose, “are you more worthy after abstaining a year from Communion?” The very fact that you feel yourself weak and easily drawn into sin is the very reason why you should receive often. The Church bids you to repeat with the priest before Communion the humble acknowledgment, “Lord, I am not worthy.” The longer you abstain from this heavenly food the less worthy do you become to receive, since it is, as the Council of Trent points out, “the antidote whereby we are delivered from daily faults and preserved from deadly sins.”

Paderewski tells us that when he failed to practice on his piano for a single day, he would notice the difference in his playing. When he remained away two days, his wife could notice the difference, three days, his friends could observe it, and when he remained away four days, the whole audience could notice the difference. So too it is with those who are accustomed to keep not their fingers but their hearts and consciences sensitive to the music of divine grace and the warmth of divine love by daily Holy Communion. Each day’s abstention leaves its perceptible effect in dulling the sensitivity of the conscience to the music of divine inspiration and in blunting the delicacy of the love for the Eucharistic Lord.

I am afraid of losing my respect and devotion for Holy Communion by too great familiarity. The reception will become too much of a mechanical routine.

Loss of devotion will result from improper preparation. Yet, if one prepares devoutly for Holy Communion, frequent reception will deepen the sentiments of reverence and love. Familiarity in the sense of intimacy and union with Christ is not to be deprecated but is the

object of all prayer and spiritual exercise. Regarding routine, two kinds are to be distinguished. There is the routine objected to in Rule 2 of the Decree on Daily Holy Communion. This is the purely mechanical reception of the Sacrament with an attitude of irreverence or at least of indifference, in short, with an absence of “a right and devout disposition.” This attitude is the very opposite of the one engendered by frequent Communion when care is taken to prepare properly for this great act by the arousal of sentiments of reverence and love. “They that eat me, shall yet hunger; and they that drink me, shall yet thirst.” This saying of Ecclesiasticus reflects the experience of every devout recipient of frequent Communion.

The second kind of routine is that which is synonymous with habit. In this sense, routine indicates a facility of action that is most desirable regarding all virtuous deeds. Thus, it is eminently desirable to make the daily recitation of one’s morning and evening prayers a matter of routine or habit. Hence, too it is most desirable to make the devout reception of daily Holy Communion a matter of habitual practice instead of being dependent upon whim or caprice. The whole aim of the spiritual life is to render the performance of virtuous actions a matter of routine or habit.

I do not like going to Communion without confession and I do not have either the time or the opportunity to go to confession each day.

The Church teaches that one may receive Holy Communion repeatedly without going to confession, provided of course one is not conscious of any mortal sin. Why then should you insert an action not required by the Pope? The Decree on Daily Communion explicitly states that only two conditions are requisite, namely, the “state of grace” and “a right and devout intention.” It is not the mark of a good Catholic to be more exacting than the Pope. Consequently, one may go to Communion for several weeks if he desires on the one confession.

Frequent Holy Communion is all right for women and children, but it is somewhat inappropriate for men.

With God, there is no double standard of morality or piety, one for women and another for men. Prayer and the sacraments are the means of grace alike for men, women, and children. Because men are frequently more exposed to temptation than women, there is a correspondingly greater need for this divine antidote to sin. To think it was meant chiefly for women and children is a complete misconception of the purpose for which Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist. It is meant for all and especially for those who are exposed to danger. It is their best fortification.

For example, the martyrs, who walked out into the arena of the Roman amphitheatre to face the gladiator's sword or the savage lions, found in the devout reception of the Holy Eucharist the strength that sustained them for their ordeal without faltering. Jean Paul Richter said, "The strongest among the pure and the purest among the strong. Christ with His wounded hands lifted empires from their hinges and changed the stream of centuries." He who bows his head in the frequent reception of this divine manna becomes the strongest, the manliest, and the most courageous among men.

When Frederick B. Snite, Jr., was stricken with infantile paralysis while traveling in China, the doctors gave him about a week to live. Years have now elapsed and he is still alive and apparently winning his battle against the dread disease. True, his parents with princely generosity and a devotion that has never faltered have provided him with every help known to medical science. This does not explain the secret of his indomitable courage, his buoyancy, and his unfailing cheerfulness. If you ask him, he will tell you it is the Eucharistic food that comes to him each day.

After the malady had paralyzed the muscles used in breathing, it then rendered him unable to utter a single word. The walls of the iron lung closed in upon him, leaving only his head free. He was unable to move, unable to breathe by himself, and unable to speak. What a plight! Yet, in this awful crisis, the priest brought to him each day a hidden source of strength and courage. After months elapsed, his father disclosed to me when I visited, he regained the power to utter a single word barely audible to those standing near him. The single word "God!" was the first word he uttered upon emerging from that breathless and speechless world in which he had been so long imprisoned.

Slowly he regained a little more strength and became able to say a whole phrase. When the priest one morning held aloft the Eucharistic host, preparatory to giving him Holy Communion, there came from his lips as he gazed devoutly at his Eucharistic Lord the scarcely audible ejaculation, "O God! How I thank Thee for this Gift!" Truly is the Holy Eucharist the source of courage, of strength, of manliness. It is the Bread of Angels and the food of heroes.

I do not have sufficient time for proper preparation for Holy Communion nor for the thanksgiving afterwards. Hence, I cannot receive often.

True, there should be due preparation. Does this mean the recitation of many prayers, the performance of many devotional exercises? Not at all. The best preparation for Communion is a good life and the sanctifying of one's ordinary daily actions. Moreover, "frequent Communion is the best preparation for Communion," says á Lapide, "one Communion is thanksgiving for another; and the Communion of today is the best preparation for the Communion of tomorrow." "Therefore," says Saint Alphonsus Liguori, "if you have not time to prepare yourself, in consequence of some good work or some duty

of your state, do not abstain from Communion on that account. Only take care to avoid useless conversations and occupations that are not urgent.”

If one is hurried, it will still be possible to make the immediate preparation while going to the Church, and to continue the thanksgiving on the way home. Two axioms apply here, namely, “Where there is a will, there is a way,” and “Love will find a way.” The individual who has once experienced the warmth and intimacy of daily union with Christ in Holy Communion will laugh at the trivial excuses that deter the faint-hearted and the indifferent.

Why should I start the practice of daily Communion when I know that I shall not be able to keep it up?

Even if the practice cannot be continued when one leaves school, or moves to a different location, it will nevertheless be a matter of supreme importance to have fortified one’s character and deepened one’s virtue and piety by having received frequently for even a limited period. The fact is that young people during the plastic days of their youth stand in need of greater spiritual reinforcements than they will after their characters are formed. During adolescence, new passions are awakening with them. Their experience is very limited and offers but little help in restraining the forces striving for the mastery. During this crucial period when youth is sculpturing his character for weal or for woe, it is an immense advantage to form the habit of frequent Communion so that he will have the most powerful ally in the world on his side.

There can be no doubt of the successful outcome if youth will employ the most effective antidote for the temptations that press round about him on every side. The habit of frequent Communion will tide him over the critical years of adolescence and plant so deep in his young soul the seeds of piety and virtue that the after-years will bring an abundant harvest. Daily Holy Communion for the youth of every school and college in our land is the ideal placed before us by the Sovereign Pontiff. A ministry of more than a quarter of a century among students at Illinois and at Notre Dame has crystallized in me the unshakeable conviction that the formation of such a habit is the best guarantee of their enduring faith and character and the most valuable contribution we can render to them.

“Christ Knocks, But You Must Open”

In the chapel of Keble College, Oxford, there hangs the famous masterpiece, *The Light of the World*, by Holman Hunt. It depicts the Master standing and knocking at a door upon which vines are growing. The hinges are rusty from long disuse. In His hand, He holds a lantern. “Behold,” He is saying, “I stand at the door, and knock.” When Hunt had finished his painting, he invited his fellow artists to inspect it.



"The Light of the World,"
by William Holman Hunt (1827–1910). *

They viewed it carefully from this angle and from that. Loud were they in their praise.

"It is a masterpiece of all time," they said.

"But," said one of them, "you have forgotten one thing." "What is that?" asked Hunt.

"You have forgotten to place a knob on the door."

"No," said Hunt, "I have not forgotten it. I have omitted it purposely. For that is the door of the human heart and it opens only from within."

Christ may knock. Christ may plead. But it is only we who can admit Him. Christ is standing today before the door of every human heart, pleading for admittance in the Sacrament of His Love. Will you not open it each day and let Him in?

If Catholics but understood how easy and simple it is to receive Holy Communion frequently, even daily, and how fruitful is this practice, the number of frequent communicants would grow by leaps and bounds. Certainly, weekly reception is most easy. We all are obliged to hear Mass on Sunday. Why not arise at the Communion time and walk up to the railing and receive the Source of all goodness and the Author of all holiness? Why not thus receive the maximum fruit of the Eucharistic Sacrifice?



* Painted in 1851, it is in the public domain in the United States, and those countries with a copyright term of life of the author plus 100 years or less.

Will you not, dear reader, put aside all vacillation and hesitancy and do your part through frequent Communion in bringing about that Eucharistic renaissance which means so much for the happiness of the individual and the peace and welfare of the world? Let us show the world once and for all by the eloquence of our actions that we believe with a profound and deathless faith the words of our divine Master, Jesus Christ when He said, "My flesh is meat indeed; and my blood is drink indeed . . . He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up on the last day.

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